

CHAMBERS'S JOURNAL

OF

POPULAR

LITERATURE, SCIENCE, AND ART.

Fourth Series

CONDUCTED BY WILLIAM AND ROBERT CHAMBERS.

No. 511.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, 1873.

PRICE 1½d.

AN OLD MAN'S DARLING.

IN TWO CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.—ETHEL'S FIRST CONQUEST.

THE churchyard at Hawkshaw, in Kent, is one of the prettiest in England. Thirty years ago, the then vicar made a regular garden of it, taking advantage of certain abrupt inequalities of ground; planting shrubs of cheerful character, to the exclusion of yews and weeping-willows; causing the gravel-paths to wind about, instead of intersecting the lawns at right angles; and encouraging the practice of converting graves into flower-beds. To be buried there does not seem like being buried so much as being planted out, and the grave is robbed of much of that extrinsic terror for which we English seem to entertain a gloomy predilection.

I speak of the beauty of this churchyard in the present tense, because it is tended with as much care now as when the late vicar was the proprietor, not a tenant of it; but it was only recently laid out, and the roots of the young trees had hardly got fairly hold of the soil on the fine October afternoon when Dr Antrobus entered it for the first time. Dr Antrobus was very learned, very ingenious, very clear-headed, and very young; as young as a man well could be to have taken the degree of doctor of medicine. His student friends called him Faust, averring solemnly that he was well on in his second century, but had drunk a rejuvenating potion, some witch's put-me-back; and it was certainly difficult for the ordinary learner to imagine how he could have acquired so much knowledge in so few years. The secret of his success was, that he loved science for its own sake, without any thought of self-interest or fame. Possessed of a small property, which rendered him independent of his profession, private practice was not the all-important matter to him which it is to most medical men, and he was quite content to settle down in a quiet country town, with a small, poor, and healthy population, where he had plenty of leisure to devote to the ologies.

Had he, however, been ever so desirous of professional success, it is doubtful whether Antrobus could have attained it. He was thought very highly of at hospitals; more than one learned society courted him; high-class medical and philosophical journals considered his manuscripts as valuable as bank-notes. But he was modest, diffident, hesitating; and he was not a ladies' man.

It was on the third day of his arrival that he entered the pretty churchyard, hammer in hand; for when he found himself in a new part of the earth, he was like a schoolboy alone with a pie, he could not keep his fingers off the crust; and in cutting a pathway on the side of a hill, the workmen had exposed a rock of interesting character, there being room for argument as to how it got there.

Dr Antrobus was of middle height, diminished by a slight stoop, the result of studious habits, which had likewise compelled him to wear spectacles; he had a benevolent expression of countenance, and a broad massive forehead. His dress was always the same, summer and winter, grubbing in the fields, dredging at sea, or at a patient's bedside; and consisted of shepherd's plaid trousers; black tail-coat and waistcoat; spotted silk handkerchief, twisted several times round his neck, and tied in a little bow, which was sometimes under one ear, sometimes under the other, never straight; high shirt collars, intended to stick up, but not succeeding very well; and a chimney-pot hat in need of brushing, and worn too far back on his head. But he was as clean, though not so sleek, as a cat.

He was in geological luck that afternoon, for Mattock the sexton was digging a grave, and so revealing secrets of subsoil. Mattock misinterpreted the interest taken by the stranger in his operations.

'It will be a dry un, sir,' said he, pausing in his work, and looking up to the top of the pit in which he stood.

'So I perceive—chalk,' replied the doctor.

'You knowed her, may be, sir?' continued the sexton, leaning on his spade in a chat-inviting manner. Experience had taught him that promiscuous conversation often led to beer.

'I can't say till I hear her name ; most probably not.'

'Cane, her name was—Miss Cane, as is to be buried-to-morrow.'

'No ; I never heard of her.'

'Ah, then you haven't been to Hawkshaw before ; that's certain. No offence ; I thought you might have been a relative. O lor, what a winner she were !'

Doubtful whether this was praise or blame, Dr Antrobus uttered a neutral 'Ah !'

'She were,' continued Mattock, 'reg'lar lightning and vinegar ; a reg'lar lady too, but such a tongue ! The children used to cut and run when they saw her, and she could never keep but one servant, who was stone deaf. But she meant no harm, bless you ; she had a kind heart.'

This last sentence was a tribute to death, not the result of experience. Mattock remembered the proverb, *de mortuis*, &c. just then, and felt that it applied with extra force when the departed was a customer. He would gladly have mentioned her virtues, but they did not chance to occur to him ; so he shook his head, and went on digging.

'Papa !' cried a silvery voice behind Dr Antrobus, who turned round, and saw a fairy, who, finding a stranger instead of a father, opened her small mouth and large eyes very wide, and took stock of him. Approving, she remained where she was, and smiled.

'Well, my dear,' said the doctor, 'you see I am not papa. Have you lost him ? Shall we look for him ?'

'No. Who are you ?'

'I am Gregory Powder.'

'Where are the fowers ?'

'The flowers ; well, I do not see any. There are no autumn flowers planted, and the summer flowers are all dead.'

'What a pity !'

'Never mind, dear ; they will all come again in the spring.'

'All come in the spring ? Sure ?'

'Yes ; their roots are in the ground, and alive.'

'Why is Mattock digging the hole ?' asked the child, peeping in.

'They are going to bury Miss Cane.'

'Oh ! Do you know I did not like Miss Cane—much.' Then, after a pause : 'I hope Miss Cane won't come up again in the spring !'

'Oh, you nice child !' cried the doctor, catching her up, 'I have a good mind to kiss you.'

'You may kiss me if you won't sc'ub,' said the little maid composedly. 'Papa sc'ubs d'eadful sometimes. Oh, there he is !'

The doctor turned in the direction indicated, and saw a stout man with a green net, who immediately called out :

'What, Antrobus ! I am glad to have lit upon you in this lucky way. I called on you an hour ago, but you were out. I was pleased to see your card, yesterday, I can tell you. Is it true that you are coming to settle here ?'

The speaker was none other than the famous

Scaraby, whose researches in natural history once earned for him the title of the English Buffon, though of late years he had confined his personal investigations very much to moths and beetles. His worship of science, however, was catholic, and he was the president of a philosophical society, which reckoned Dr Antrobus amongst its most promising members.

'I have fallen in love with your little girl,' said the doctor. 'By-the-bye, Scaraby, I did not know that you were a family man.'

'I have lost all but Ethel,' replied Mr Scaraby ; 'and their mother has gone from me too. I should be a lonely man without my baby, else I had sailed before now to Fevraguana in search of the *Singewing furdavorans*, of which I have no satisfactory specimen. It would be hardly prudent to take her, I suppose.'

'Hardly ; especially as, if you lost her while moth-hunting, you would not find her again in a tropical forest so easily as in a Kentish churchyard.'

'True ; and she is a regular little truant.—Are you not, Ethel ?'

'Sometimes ; when papa's vewy long cashing butterflies.'

The acquaintance which already existed between Scaraby and Antrobus soon ripened into a close friendship. Their tastes, their interests, were the same ; their dispositions were similar, and the twenty years' difference between their ages was never thought of by either. And Ethel played about the pair of philosophers like a kitten. It was absurd to see how fond Antrobus grew of her. She called him by the first name he had given himself, Gregory Powder, for six months ; when he was promoted to Uncle Gregory, and there he remained, though his real name was William. She was indeed a very nice child ; never troublesome, always able to amuse herself, and very original.

When the doctor had been settled three years in Hawkshaw, she put the final touch to her conquest. He went to the bank one day upon some business which necessitated an interview with one of the partners in his private room ; and as he was coming out again into the office, he heard his little friend's voice saying : 'Please, will you give me sixpence for that ?' and drawing back and peeping, he saw her face over the counter, which her chin just surmounted. The gray-headed clerk whom she addressed took the paper she presented, and said, in a voice trembling with suppressed laughter : 'How will you have it, Miss Scaraby—in silver or copper ?'

'Copper,' she said decisively, and walked off with a handful of halfpence.

When she was clear of the premises, the doctor came forward and received this document, written in text-hand on a leaf torn out of a copy-book, from the convulsed clerk :

please pay ethel or a bare sickspence 6d. ethel.

It seems a pity that Ethel should ever have grown out of her quaint childhood, but she did it so

imperceptibly that the transition was not observed by either her father or the doctor. Other changes took place; Antrobus ceased to live alone. He owned two maiden aunts who had hid themselves away in an odd corner of Devonshire, and subsisted pretty comfortably on annuities. When one died, however, the other found herself in somewhat straitened circumstances, so this dutiful nephew had her to keep house for him, and Ethel called her 'Granny.' She was a good soul, but rather odd and prudish, and did not much approve of the title at first. Indeed, she once remonstrated with the child; but the effect of this was that the next time Ethel called her Granny in public, she turned round and explained that Miss Antrobus could not be her grandmother really, because she had never been married, and she only called her so out of affection. So, after that, the prudent spinster accepted her brevet in silence, and by the time the girl came to live with her, would have felt hurt had she called her anything else.

Came to live with her? Yes. When Ethel was fourteen, her father caught a pleurisy in the Essex marshes, where he was beetle-hunting, and died. He left his collections to his university, his property to his child, and appointed his friend and executor, Dr Antrobus, her guardian.

This was Ethel's first acquaintance with death, for she was a mere infant when she lost her mother, and the mystery, the helpless grief, the hopeless horror of it, shattered her childhood. The wave of sorrow passed over her in time, but never again did she recover the careless, thoughtless, bird-like happiness of her former life. She knew now the evil as well as the good; her eyes were opened to the cruel reality, that every path in this world leads to one dreary waste. For the rest, the burden of the child's sorrow was lightened so far as was possible; she was spared the sudden plunge from comfort to poverty, from affectionate sympathy to cold selfishness, from petting to tyranny, which so often awaits the orphan girl. The intimacy between the families had been so close that there was little change in leaving one home for the other, and with both her guardian and his aunt, her wish was law. Indeed, Ethel Scaraby ought to have grown up into an insufferable young woman, instead of, as was the case, an exceedingly natural, self-forgetting, charming one; but there are some natures that you cannot spoil, at least by kindness.

A little more than a year after Mr Scaraby's death, Dr Antrobus was induced to join an expedition having for its object an investigation of the flora, fauna, and geological phenomena of the northern and eastern coasts of Africa, extending from Algeria to Abyssinia, and comprising Tripoli, Egypt, and Nubia. So he set his house in order. Ethel was to continue living with his aunt till the uncertain date of his return, the difficulty about her education being comfortably solved by the fact of there being a very good girls' school in the neighbourhood, to which competent masters came periodically from London. He considered his ward to be far too precious a trust indeed to be risked in the chance company of a school while her mind and heart were forming; so he made arrangements with the various professors—warranted middle-aged and married, every man of them—to give her lessons separately. It was rather expensive, but that did not matter; for,

living in Granny's simple way, it was impossible to spend her income on her.

Gibraltar was the place appointed as the rendezvous of the philosophers. When Dr Antrobus arrived there, he found that certain arrangements connected with the expedition would not be complete so soon as had been anticipated, and he had a fortnight's spare time on his hands, which he at once determined to devote to a trip that had often tempted him—a visit to Sicily and Etna; so he took passage on board a vessel bound for Messina.

Take ten fine English sunsets, add an aurora borealis, mix in a dozen rainbows, well beaten up, and you may perhaps have the right colours on your palette, to depict the scene which Dr Antrobus was enjoying as he sat in a small boat manned by two picturesque sailors, who cultivated long black moustaches, and smoked cigarettes instead of chewing quids.

The sea was a broad sheet of exquisitely stained glass, without a wave or a flaw, and having a single jewel, shaped like a two-masted felucca, set in it. The mountains, swelling gracefully upwards till they culminated in Etna, looked too soft and ethereal to be true. Enchanted boundaries of paradise they seemed, which would recede if mortal man approached them. But the doctor, who had walked all over them, routing in tufa and scoriae, knew better; he was also aware that all these fairy tints would become black with a rapidity unknown to more northern latitudes, directly the sun was turned down, and that, therefore, as he was more than a mile from the shore, it would be as well to go about. Just as he was about to give directions to that effect, however, he thought he saw a handkerchief waved, as if signalling him, on board the felucca, which was not above five hundred yards off. So he told his men to row up to her, and found, on approaching, that his surmise was correct: a lady, leaning over the bulwark, was beckoning him.

'Can I be of any service to you?' he asked, when his boat touched the side.

'Oh, you are an Englishman!' exclaimed the lady, exerting herself to make her feeble voice audible. 'Is it far from a town? Can you get me a doctor? I am so ill!'

For answer, Dr Antrobus pushed his boat along to the gangway, and stepped on board; a couple of Maltese sailors, who were seated on the deck, forwards, playing at cards, neither assisting nor hindering him. They merely gave him a keen look, and went on with their game.

The lady, though dressed like a young woman, was certainly past fifty, probably a good many years past; but some faces age sooner than others, and she was suffering.

'I am a medical man,' said Dr Antrobus; 'what is the matter?'

'A burning pain that never leaves me, and prevents my sleeping; sickness whenever I take food; at times a dizziness as if I were dying.'

'How long have you had these symptoms?'

'A month ago, at Naples, I first felt the burning, after sickness; but it passed off again at that time. Then it returned, and grew worse and worse. And you are really a medical man?'

'Certainly.'

'Pardon the question; your coming is such a direct answer to prayer! And you will save me, will you not?'

She became hysterical: when she got a little better, Dr Antrobus helped her down into the cabin, where he expected to find some female attendant; but no; except the two sailors who were playing at cards on deck, and themselves, there did not seem to be a soul on board. Yet the vessel, though of Genoese build and lateen rig, was fitted up like an English yacht, and as she was of about twenty tons' burden, her crew could hardly consist of two men only.

After certain further inquiries and examination, Dr Antrobus asked if she had merely taken a passage in the vessel.

'O no,' said she; 'we have hired it, with the crew, and have been cruising about in it for upwards of three weeks.'

'Then you first experienced these symptoms just before you sailed?'

'Yes: we had engaged the yacht, and made all arrangements.'

'You say *we*; I conclude that the rest of your party has gone ashore?'

'Yes.'

'Do you repose perfect confidence in all those who are constantly about you?'

'Tell me the truth, sir, I adjure you!' cried the lady, grasping his arm: 'am I not—poisoned?'

'Yes.'

The sufferer wrung her hands, and fell forward on the table at which she was sitting, in an agony of fear and grief. When this had passed by a little, she broke out into violent exclamations.

'Fool that I was,' she cried, 'to believe in his repentance, his returning love! To be talked over again by his soft tongue after all my experience! You asked if I have confidence in those about me, sir: there is only one about me, and he is my husband. I had confidence in him, God help me! though he squandered my money on his vices, and quarrelled with me when I refused him more. But when he owned himself in the wrong, and promised to reform, I trusted him again, and came abroad alone with him, without a single attendant. And he has murdered me for my money—murdered me!—Ah!' she exclaimed, in a lower voice, as the splash of oars was heard, 'he has returned. Say nothing of this to him, I implore you, or he will kill me out of hand. There is no Englishman on board; and these foreigners will believe anything he says, and do whatever he tells them.'

'Calm yourself,' said the doctor hurriedly; 'eat nothing but biscuit, drink nothing but water. I will apply to the authorities at Messina, and come to your rescue soon. What is your name?'

Before the lady could reply, a dark, handsome young man, dressed in yachting costume, sprang down the hatchway, and stood before them. It was not an easy task for Dr Antrobus to suppress his feelings and treat this man unconcernedly; but he had determined in his own mind the wisest course to take, and he adhered to it. The newcomer had considerable command over himself also, for though he was very pale, and his lips twitched slightly, he put on an expression of indignant surprise as he bowed slightly to the intruding stranger.

'Pardon my having boarded you in this uncere- monious fashion,' said the doctor. 'I was deceived by the rig of your yacht, and thought it was some trading vessel in which I might get a passage to Italy. This lady has undeceived me, and I have but to apologise for the mistake.'

'Pray, do not mention it,' said the young man, with an evident effort to steady his voice. 'Won't you — Can't I offer you something?'

'No, thank you,' replied the doctor cheerfully. 'I must get on shore at once; it will be dark presently.—Good-evening, madam.'

A WARNING TO EMIGRANTS.

For many years the governments of South America have been making great exertions to stimulate immigration from Europe. Possessed of territory of great fertility and unlimited extent, which requires for its development only an increased population, it is natural that those governments should look to the densely peopled countries of the Old World as the source from which their want of population may be supplied. Till recently, their attention had been directed principally to the continent of Europe, and while Brazil drew her immigrants from Switzerland and Germany, the bulk of the emigrants to the Argentine Confederation, and the republics of Paraguay and Uruguay, were obtained from Italy, Portugal, and the Basque Provinces of France and Spain. During the last two or three years, however, attempts have been made, by the appointment of agents, and the issue of prospectuses, to obtain emigrants from the United Kingdom. These proceedings having attracted the attention both of the British Ministers in South America and of the home government, Reports as to the treatment and prospects of British emigrants in South America were called for. Two of these Reports—one by Mr M'Donell, Her Majesty's *chargé d'affaires* at Buenos Ayres; the other by Mr Phipps, a member of the Embassy at Rio de Janeiro—have been embodied in the recently issued *Thirty-third General Report of the Emigration Commissioners*; and as the words of the writers are words of warning rather than of encouragement to intending emigrants, we shall be doing a service to the labouring class of this country by giving to these Reports a much wider circulation than a blue-book can hope to attain.

As regards the Argentine Confederation, Mr M'Donell divides the industries in the republic into five classes—namely, sheep-farming, cattle-farming, agriculture, mining, and commerce. Of the first two, sheep-farming has been very profitable, and is well suited for Irish and Scotch settlers with capital, but not for ordinary emigrants. Cattle-farming cannot be followed with any prospect of success by any but natives, or settlers who have been long enough in the country to have acquired the habits and skill of natives.

Agriculture is the pursuit to which the ordinary emigrant would naturally devote himself, but agriculture, notwithstanding the great fertility of the soil, does not prosper. It has to contend against great variability of climate—drought at one time, heavy and persistent rains at another, storms of wind and dust, locusts, vermin, and insects; so that not more than one good season out of five can be counted on. And when a good season comes, the cost of transport is so great, that imported produce can be sold in the towns at a lower rate than produce raised in the country. The only agricultural pursuit that really succeeds is the cultivation of vegetables and fruit in the neighbourhood of towns, which is generally in the hands of Italian gardeners.

The system adopted by the Argentine government for promoting emigration, is by the establishment of 'colonies.' Under this system, large tracts of land are sold at a low price to contractors, who undertake to introduce within a certain time a specified number of settlers. These contractors employ agents in Europe, who engage emigrants, and make them advances for passage, settlement, maintenance, &c. 'On his arrival at the colony, the immigrant proceeds to fence in and break up the allotted land; but being entirely under the control and at the mercy of the contractor, or his agent, finds toil, hardship, and privation his lot. His earnings, possibly, for a time just defray the advances made to him at an enormous rate of interest, and no means are shortly left wherewith to procure the commonest necessities. Disheartened, he either deserts the colony, thus forfeiting the fruits of many months hard toil, and risking his life on the journey; or less daring, and perhaps the father of a family, is forced to work out the term of his contract, only finally to be driven from the colony, his claim to the land originally allotted having lapsed, in default of repayment of the advances made to him.'

The chief obstacles to the success of the British immigrants consist, Mr M'Donnell says, in the climate, the language, habits, and religion of the natives, and in the insecurity of life and property, by reason of the lawlessness of the native population, the incursions of the Indians, and the defective administration of justice. Immigrants, if laborious and steady, will, however, find occupation on farms at wages varying from twenty pounds to thirty pounds per annum, with meat, rations, and a resting-place; and a hard-working, industrious, and sober man may in a comparatively short number of years better his position considerably, by getting sheep lent to him 'on shares,' and dividing the produce and increase with the owner of the estate in exchange for his services. English artisans cannot succeed, the towns being overstocked with workmen from Southern Europe. Men of energetic and temperate habits, with some means, who are indifferent to diet and mode of living, and have some agricultural and pastoral knowledge, and skill in applying it, may expect success. But emigrants of this description should not go out singly or in detachments, but in a body, under very competent management, and accompanied by a sufficient quota of mechanics, the whole to be consigned to responsible parties, who should have orders to concentrate them on one spot. Irish female servants command good wages, and may safely go to the country, on account of the praiseworthy efforts made by the Irish clergy and Sisters of Mercy to befriend them on landing.

A short allusion to the republic of Uruguay concludes Mr M'Donnell's Report. The condition of the country, he says, makes it incumbent on him to warn immigrants that by going there they expose their lives and property to great risk. This view is a confirmation of the one given by Mr Consul Monro in his Report to the Foreign Office for the year 1871, who is equally decided in the terms in which he speaks of the unsuitableness of Uruguay as a place for emigrants. 'The number of individuals,' he says, 'who have landed with tickets from Europe, Brazil, and the United States for Monte Video, in the year 1871, has been 17,912; but the greater number of these, on finding

that there was safety neither for life nor property in the interior of the country, have gone elsewhere. The real emigration in the year 1871 may be considered to have been on a much reduced scale in comparison with former years; and when foreigners are constantly made to serve both in the government and rebel ranks, and, while serving, are subject to the worst of treatment, in addition to the compulsory risk of their lives, it is not wonderful that those whose circumstances will allow them leave the country, when they discover the mistake they made in coming to it. Allusion is, of course, only made to those of the labouring class who have to seek the means of living in the interior of the country.' The information given of Paraguay is even more unfavourable than that as to the Argentine Confederation.

Mr Phipps' Report on Brazil had its origin in the fact of the Brazilian government having entered into a contract with the secretary of the London and Brazilian Bank for the introduction of ten thousand emigrants with their families from the north of Europe. Northern Europeans, says he, are unable to labour in the fields, by reason of the climate; and so little chance of success have artisans from the north of Europe, that a stipulation has been introduced into recent immigration contracts that the number of artisans among the immigrants should not exceed five per cent. In addition to these drawbacks, the state of the law in regard to contracts with foreign colonists places a labourer very much at the mercy of his employer, so much so, that a foreigner might find himself little better than a slave, and treated like a convict, should his possible inability to work be distorted into unwillingness. A 'free labourer' working on a coffee-plantation according to the practice of the country would, after paying all his expenses of rent, food, clothing, &c. make a profit of about thirty pounds a year. This, however, would only apply to a native, or an immigrant who had been sufficiently long in the country to become acclimatised, and to have acquired the habits of the people. In this case, the food of the labourer is said to consist generally of maize, herbs, rice, bacon, meal, sometimes fowl, eggs, and coffee; and the cost of it is put at twelve milreis—about twenty-four shillings a month.

The conclusion to which Mr Phipps comes is: 'That it seems an impossibility that, under the present legislation existing in Brazil, British subjects can be encouraged to risk health and independence for an inadequate remuneration, in a trying climate, among people of different habits and ideas to their own, when so many English-speaking countries are bidding highly for their services.'

In Mr Phipps' second Report is an account of the very deplorable condition in which a party of emigrants, induced to embark from Liverpool last year, found themselves, when landed on the inhospitable shores of Brazil. Not one received the bonus promised, and ultimately they were forced to work on the roads. Much sickness, small-pox, and low fever prevailed, and twenty-two of the children and four adults died. Many were in rags and barefoot. We spare other sickening details.

Having regard to the various facts which we have just elucidated, we are not surprised to find the Emigration Commissioners intimate at the end

of their Report that they have thought it advisable to put out notices from time to time cautioning emigrants against proceeding to South America. Our own advice simply is: 'Do not, as you value life-long comfort, emigrate to any country in that quarter of the world!'

THE TELEGRAPH CLEARING-HOUSE.

THE branch, which is known in the Postal Telegraph Service as the 'Clearing-house,' was first established in the beginning of 1871, experimentally for the purpose of examining at least one day's messages in every month of each Postal and Railway Telegraph Office in England and Wales, with the object of having a check upon the miscellaneous faults which are apt to occur in the transmission and delivery of telegrams. The necessity for establishing some such check was evident to the Post-office authorities, since every day's experience shewed them that less discredit accrued to the department through deficiencies or bad working of the plant, than through careless or wilful inattention to matters unconnected with it; such as inattention to handwriting, orthography, and the sense of the message; to the sender's written instructions; to the prompt transmission of the message from the counter to the instrument, or from the instrument to the messenger; and to various other matters of detail which ought to be cared for if the work is to be properly done.

A branch for similar purposes was instituted by the late Electric and International Telegraph Company, and it was the knowledge of the valuable aid which it had rendered in furthering the efficiency of that Company, which no doubt induced Mr Scudamore to consider the question of establishing one in the postal service. It is pleasing to know that Mr Scudamore's efforts for this object, by the establishment of the 'Clearing-house check,' were replete with success, which he testifies to in these words: 'We have the satisfaction of knowing that the operation of the "Clearing-house check" has been very salutary. It has led the clerks throughout the country to pay attention to the rules which have been laid down with regard to the signalling of messages, to use their utmost exertions to get messages off promptly, to write out the received messages carefully, and to expedite the delivery of these messages to the best of their ability.'

The formation of the branch was intrusted to the care of Mr Chetwynd, the Receiver and Accountant General of the Post-office, to whose office it was attached. He secured the services of Mrs Arundel-Colliver as superintendent, a lady whose successful management of this great experiment has proved that she is in every way competent to fulfil the responsible duties of such a post; and he also obtained the services of Miss Green and Miss Boulton as assistants of the superintendent. The rest of the staff comprises forty well qualified ladies; and it is but due to the department to state that it has been most particular in the

selection which it has made from the numerous candidates for appointment in this branch. The hours of the office are from ten until five o'clock each working day, with the exception of Saturdays, when the duties terminate at two o'clock.

Since its establishment, the 'Clearing-house' has greatly increased, and is now divided into two sections; the one being designated the 'message section'; while the other is termed the 'account section.' The former is occupied in the examination of messages, the work for which the branch was primarily intended, and which is done in the following manner. The messages, numbering sixty thousand a day, are first received at the Telegraph Message Branch of the Receiver and Accountant General's Office, from the various telegraph offices in England and Wales, where they undergo examination as to correct charges having been accounted for; they are next 'traced,' a duty which consists in bringing together the original form of a telegram (that is, the one upon which the sender has written his message) and the duplicate copy made out at the destination of the same, and attaching them to one another. Having undergone this operation, the messages are tied up in the alphabetical order of the offices of origin, and in order of date, and sent to the 'Clearing-house' for inspection. Each lady employed in examining in the 'message section' has a certain number of messages given to her daily, each one of which she has to inspect very carefully, comparing the forwarded copy with the received copy of the message; and every discrepancy which she discovers, and every instance of delay in transmission, of bad handwriting, inaccuracy, or erroneous signalling, is at once brought under the special notice of the postmaster of the office with whom the fault has lain. These errors and the explanations of them are duly recorded in a register; and at the end of every month a statement, shewing the errors and irregularities discovered during the preceding month, is forwarded to the local surveyor of the post-office in fault, for his information. The utility of this section is very apparent, since it is the means of preventing the repetition of faults which frequently occur in the transmission and receipt of telegrams, and which must, in many instances, be very annoying to the public, although, perhaps, uncomplained of by them; and it is by shewing the postmasters and clerks,' says Mr Scudamore, 'that their shortcomings would be discovered even though the public did not complain, that we gradually increase and perfect the efficiency of our working.' Again, regarding the usefulness of this section of the 'Clearing-house,' in a business point of view, it will at once be seen how essential it is to the department, for, to use Mr Scudamore's words once more, 'People who receive messages which are promptly transmitted and delivered, which are accurately rendered, and which are written out clearly and distinctly, are insensibly tempted to send telegraph messages. People who find that telegraph messages are long in reaching them, and are inaccurately rendered, or are unintelligible, either from bad writing, or bad trans-

mitting, do not feel at all inclined to trouble their friends with similar annoyances.'

We now come to the 'account section' of the branch, which is occupied principally in making out a monthly abstract of the number of messages dealt with, the amounts paid out, and the charges collected at each of the four thousand Postal Telegraph Offices in England and Wales, the items being extracted from the daily telegraph accounts of these offices. The object in view in doing this is, to enable the Post-office to check the entries in their ledgers, containing the cash accounts of the various postmasters. It will be perceived that this object is a very useful one to the department, as it is the means of discovering and eventually reducing the number of discrepancies which arise between the cash accounts and telegraph accounts of the different post-offices throughout the country; and this, we learn, has been completely successful.

The residue of the staff of this office is engaged in doing the correspondence of the branch, the registration of the various papers and reports, and in miscellaneous work.

The offices of the 'Clearing-house,' which are at present at Albion Place, Blackfriars, are found too small for the increasing requirements of the branch; it is, however, expected that the rooms allotted to this staff in the new Post-office will shortly be in readiness to receive them, when they will no doubt be able to work with greater convenience than at present.

Clearing-houses have also been established at the General Post-offices in Dublin and in Edinburgh, which keep a check upon the telegraphic work performed in Ireland and Scotland, in a manner similar to that which has been described at the London office.

In concluding this paper, it is well to draw attention to the great success which has attended the experiment of the Post-office in employing females to do clerical work, for the manner in which the duties of the 'Clearing-house' have been performed seems to have given great satisfaction to both Mr Scudamore and Mr Chetwynd, the chief promoters of the experiment; referring to it, the former significantly remarks, that 'the work, which chiefly consists in *fault-finding*, is well within the capacity of the *female staff*, and has been performed in a very satisfactory manner.' The Postmaster-general also shews his approbation of the experiment, by the notice which he takes of it in his Report upon the Post-office for 1872, and which runs thus: 'It is with pleasure that I have given my approval to the measures that have been proposed for increasing the employment of women in the Post-office; the first great step in that direction having been taken by my predecessor, Lord Hartington, in relation to the telegraphs. How much remains to be done towards removing those artificial barriers which have hitherto shut out women from lucrative employment may be gathered from the fact, that, on a late occasion, when it was announced, by advertisement, that there were twelve vacancies for junior counter-women, at wages from fourteen to seventeen shillings a week, more than twelve hundred candidates presented themselves; the very thoroughfare, as I am informed, in the neighbourhood of the office of the Civil Service Commissioners having been for a time blocked up.' It is satisfactory to learn that the success of the 'Clearing-house' has been the

means of inducing Mr Scudamore to consider the question of intrusting, at a future period, a great portion of the work belonging to other branches of the telegraph service to female clerks.

LADY LIVINGSTON'S LEGACY.

CHAPTER XI.—BY THE BOATHOUSE.

'COME down at once, dear Frederick. Lose no time. Meet me at the boathouse by the river, to-morrow, at two. Lose not a moment. What you know of has come to light. Do not fail me. Come at once.—V. M.'

The note was addressed to Sir Frederick Dashwood.

Strange to say, Violet Maybrook, in her own room, had spent two hours in composing this apparently simple and unstudied document, surrounded as she was by torn fragments of letter-paper, on each of which had been traced a few lines, written only to be condemned before the ink was dry. The style of some of these inchoate epistles varied very much. Some were proud, curt, and cold; others breathed fond words of love, never destined to reach the hands of him for whom they were designed. At length, and after many failures, Violet wrote, directed, and sealed her letter; and in the cold gray of early morning she carried it herself to the post-office. The day was yet young, the metropolitan deliveries are frequent enough to insure Dashwood's prompt receipt of the missive, she could not doubt that he would obey her summons.

The weather being still fine, with frequent sunshine and filmy cloud-streaks to mottle the pale-blue sky, it was probable that Lady Livingston would take her accustomed carriage-exercise at three o'clock, accompanied as usual by Miss Maybrook, and hence the choice of two, as the hour most convenient for a meeting between Violet and Sir Frederick. The attendance of the former on her titled employer was not very close, and she anticipated no difficulty in leaving the house, unquestioned and unseen, to keep her appointment with the baronet. All combinations, however, that relate to human conduct are liable to be disturbed by some unexpected action on the part of another, and so it proved in this instance, since it was the dowager's fancy to order her carriage full an hour earlier than usual, and to notify the fact to Violet. Whatever might have been the faults in Miss Maybrook's nature, she was at least superior to the petty artifices congenial to some dispositions, and it was with strong repugnance and keen self-reproach that she schooled her proud and passionate soul to dissemble. She was ill, she said at length, faint and giddy, and must ask Lady Livingston to excuse her for being unequal to accompanying her during her drive. It was nothing, a mere trifle, and would soon pass away; but if the dowager pleased, Violet would go to her room and lie down for awhile.

'I don't like companions who are always ill,' said the mistress of the Fountains, drumming with her foot upon the silken footstool, so soon as the door had closed on Violet. 'One invalid in a house is enough, I should say. Miss Maybrook was just what I could wish, until last night, but now she seems quite altered. It's all very well, Beatrice dear, for you to volunteer to drive out with me in

her stead, and I'm too selfish to say no; but it is intolerable that you should be boxed up in a chariot, and bowled along a dull road that you don't care about, merely because this girl has the fancies of a fine lady. Nerves, I suppose! I don't know, I declare, what the world is coming to. I presume Molly the housemaid will be troubled with nerves presently. When I was young, nobody had such things, except ladies of quality and rich old maids. It is abominably inconsiderate on the part of Miss Maybrook, and I shall take care that she knows my opinion.

Having uttered which severe remarks with a becoming austerity, the dowager summoned Mrs Hart the housekeeper, and bade her to administer wine, sal-volatile, or whatsoever cordial or anodyne her experience might suggest, and to pay all attention to the comfort of the culprit whom she had just been denouncing. And before starting for her early drive, she went herself to Violet's darkened chamber, and spoke to its lonely occupant almost as tenderly as she would have done to her own daughter. But Miss Maybrook would have nothing, not even the solace of a fire. Sleep and quiet were all that she wished for, and Mrs Hart's suggestions were all met with a gentle negative. Wherefore, the dowager came down-stairs grumbling at the inconsiderate behaviour of her new companion in falling ill, and, with Beatrice, started for her drive.

'I think, if I could sleep, it would do me good. I need not trouble you any more, Mrs Hart, thank you,' said Violet; and the housekeeper, with her jingling keys and rustling raiment, at length retired, and left Miss Maybrook free to act. It is no easy matter, in most cases, to quit a large house, well garrisoned by servants, unperceived. And Violet well knew the risk which she was forced to run, and was aware that for the seeming invalid of half an hour ago to be seen abroad would be sufficient to attract towards her the fatal curiosity of the domestics, a curiosity Argus-eyed, and as full of tongues as Rumour itself. As yet, she was not unpopular with the household, in spite of the increasing favour with which she was viewed by their noble mistress, but then she had been very wary to give no vantage-ground to malicious gossiping. Violet divined, rather than knew, that the old saying, 'A favourite has no friend,' would approve itself true in her case, should she lay herself open to reproach on the part of her inferiors in station. She had to wait, then, till the coast should be clear, and until she was pretty well assured that the part of the house in which her chamber was situated was free from the presence of Mrs Hart and her subordinates in cap and apron. She did wait, with a beating heart and clenched hands, hearkening to the ticking of the French clock on her chimney-piece. It was now long past two, and she might surely, nay, must surely, incur the venture.

The Fountains, like most eighteenth-century mansions, was more liberally provided with back-stairs, passages, and side-doors, than are houses of similar pretensions, but of later date. There was a seldom-used staircase, as Violet well knew, leading down from the upper portion of the west wing to a corridor on the ground-floor, whence a glass-door, barred with iron, as a precaution against burglars, gave egress to the flower-garden, and permitted an inmate of the dwelling to emerge into

the outer air with a fair prospect of being wholly unobserved. Hastily attiring herself, Violet softly opened the door of her room, satisfied herself that no prying eye was upon her, then closing the door, she locked it on the outside, and, carrying the key with her, made the best of her way down the narrow and carpetless stairs, along the white-washed passage, and through the garden-door, the bolts of which, as she had expected, yielded readily to her touch, while the key, red with rust, stood stiffly rooted in the corroded lock, as it had done for years. Her plans were carefully laid. She had not failed to mark whereabouts, at that hour, the gardeners would be employed, and this part of the pleasure-grounds she heedfully avoided, gliding from tree to tree, and from one thicket of shrubs to another, with the stealthy caution of the Indian hunter of her native woods, and preferring a long circuit to any shortening of her road which might expose her to unfriendly scrutiny from the windows. The chances were against the housekeeper's return to the room which Violet had left tenantless; but should such an event occur, the locked door would prove an effectual barrier, and Mrs Hart, after a cautious tap or two, would conclude the occupant of the chamber to be asleep, and would naturally withdraw. Lady Livingston was by this time miles away. There would be time to get through the interview with Dashwood, and to regain the room in the west wing, before the dowager should order her horses' heads to be turned towards home.

The boathouse belonging to the Fountains stood beside a tiny creek opening on the Thames, and outside the gardens. It was, like many of its congeners, a roomy, low building, in what is called rustic woodwork, roughly composed of timber with the bark on it, and with an overhanging roof of thatch. It contained boats which were in requisition, at most, some three or four times in the year, when the dowager entertained her fashionable friends from London at a lawn-party, and for the rest of the twelvemonth appeared to exist for the benefit of a superannuated waterman, who derived a snug annuity from the light duty of keeping this miniature flotilla in good repair and trim condition. There was a lane that led from the public road to the river-side, at this point, but it was very little frequented, while the angle of the boathouse formed a screen that prevented those who stood beneath it from being visible from the stream itself. The same garden-wicket which had given the means of admittance to Miss Larpent, and which was always unlocked by day, allowed Violet to quit the grounds without trouble.

She found Dashwood angrily pacing to and fro, gnawing his tawny moustache as he did so.

'So, here you are at last,' he said roughly and without lifting his hat or offering his hand. 'Half an hour and more have I had to stand sentry, kicking my heels beside this confounded shed, and all because it is your fancy to send me some absurd directions to hurry down here, post-haste, as if life and death depended on it. On my word, you take it coolly, Violet. My time is of value to myself, I assure you, in the present precious state of my affairs, whatever it may be to you.'

'You are uncivil, Sir Frederick,' said Violet, with a contemptuous curl of the lip; 'and not merely rude, but rash also. In whatever fashion you may employ your time, rest assured that the portion of it which you have spent in obeying my

summons has not been the most unprofitably spent.'

There was something in her tone and bearing which enforced his attention, and he gazed at her fixedly.

'You look anxious and harassed, Violet,' he said in more subdued accents; 'I begin to think that you really have something to say to me. I was half afraid to tell you the truth, that you only wanted me to run down that you might reproach me, as you did the other day. It cuts a fellow up, my dear, more than you can guess, to find himself treated like a dog by the woman he loves.'

And as he spoke, he tried to take her hand; but she repulsed him.

'There was a time, Fred,' she answered, 'when even those few half-careless words that you have just uttered would have been as music to me, something to be treasured and gloried in, as a miser hugs his hoarded gold; but I have grown older and wiser now, and you have taught me much. Suffice it that I did not send for you to reproach you with any part of your treatment of myself. When you promised me your hand, I really was credulous enough to believe that there was a heart to go along with it. How you must have laughed at my simplicity! I could almost share in your merriment, though at my own expense.'

And she did laugh, but the unnatural sound grated on his ear, and caused him to look upon her with renewed anxiety.

'I don't like to see you in this mood, Violet,' he rejoined earnestly; 'nor do I think I have quite deserved it. I'm not a very good fellow, I know that well enough; but when you say I never loved you, you do me injustice. I know I have not kept my word—about the marriage and that—but, Vi, a man with a millstone of debt hung about his neck ought to have a little patience shewn to him. Set me up with five thousand a year, three—two, even—and I never thought the governor could have had less to leave—and I would only be too proud to take Violet, Lady Dashwood, on my arm into any swell drawing-room in London. It's my poverty, and not my will, as the fellow says in the play.'

How is it that an habitual liar can contrive, now and again, to have some true statement accepted as worthy of credence, even by those who know him the best? By what subtle test of the intellect do we learn to distinguish the ring of the true gold from the chink of spurious metal, and feel a just assurance that we are not deceived this once, even though the lips that have spoken be on other occasions as utterly untrustworthy? Nobody, not Dashwood himself, was so familiar with the worst side of the baronet's character as was Miss Maybrook. She knew him, and scorned him, and yet, now that he stood before her, she felt, by some unerring intuition, that in that moment of emotion he had uttered the literal truth. Scorn, doubt, anger, were all for the instant swept away before the rising flood of passionate feeling, and, hardly knowing what she did, she threw her arms round Sir Frederick's neck, and kissed him repeatedly, while her tears fell like rain.

'My own again!' she exclaimed; 'bought so dearly, not to be lost—my love, my love, my love!'

This sudden outburst of resistless love and tenderness, that contempt itself had failed to kill, on the part of one so proud as was Violet, was not

quite thrown away upon him to whom it was addressed. Dashwood's hard heart, indurated by years of unchecked selfishness and self-indulgent unscrupulousness, softened for a minute. He drew the weeping girl closer to him, and so held her, with his powerful arm around her waist.

'Poor little Vi!' was all he said, but the unwonted gentleness of his voice lent a charm to the words that made them eloquent to Violet, and she clung to him, sobbing.

'We ought to be true to one another, you and I, Fred,' she murmured; 'we, who have all the world against us.'

He was kind and patient, nay, even gracious, with her as she nestled by his side, with her soft caresses and words of endearment, to which her lips had long been unused, though they had been frequent during the earlier part of their acquaintance, beyond seas. The capacity of loving was not great in Sir Frederick Dashwood, who had been a rake from his boyish days, and who had no very exalted estimate of the feminine character at any time. Yet he was proud, after a fashion, to be loved by such a one as Miss Maybrook, with all her beauty and courage and cleverness; and a hazy kind of pity rose up within him as for a moment he ceased to concentrate his thoughts upon himself, and remembered her forlorn condition and her baffled hopes.

'I do love you, Vi, my dear: never doubt it!' he said, stooping his head to kiss her; and as he spoke, he felt a sharp thrill of remorse, such as seldom awakened his seared conscience, as that inward monitor whispered to him, that to-morrow he would marry another woman for her money's sake, if only he could; and that he would never hesitate for an instant between Violet's happiness and his own ease.

Presently, after a long time, Violet seemed to arouse herself from the sweet dream of loving and being loved, and she gently but firmly released herself from Dashwood's encircling arm.

'I have been silly, Fred, dear,' she said, as she shook the tear-drops from her eyes, and stood erect and resolute before the baronet; 'silly in my gladness that you had still a little thought for Violet Maybrook. It was not for this that I summoned you; it was not for this that I have stolen, like a thief, from the house where I am believed—to such subterfuge have I been forced to stoop—to be lying ill. There is danger!'

'Real danger?' said Sir Frederick, with a slight change of colour. 'You would hardly be alarmed at a trifle, Violet, unless you are greatly altered.'

'Very real, very near, very pressing,' said Violet, with a deliberation that added weight to what she said. 'I have had a visitor here—an old acquaintance of yours and mine.'

'A visitor,' rejoined Dashwood, knitting his brows thoughtfully; 'and from Canada, of all places on this earth! Not that murdering fellow—not young Larpent—for he is in London, as I happen to know?'

'Not Bruce,' replied Violet gravely: 'his coming, if it had boded little good, might not in itself have been a portent of evil. No! You remember his sister, Aphy?'

'His sister? To be sure I do; and with some reason,' said Dashwood, stroking his heavy moustache. 'Wasn't I arm in arm with Lovelace, poor lad, when that pretty business happened at the

skating-rink! It was I who took the young fellow prisoner, with the smoking pistol yet in his hand, and a sharp tussle we had for it before I got him disarmed and down. Not, to do him justice, that he bore me any grudge for that, since I remember that when I gave evidence against him in court, and he was acquitted, he leant over the edge of the dock and offered his hand to me—but I couldn't take it, much obliged to him, because of poor Jack!

Sir Frederick looked down for a moment, and his lip quivered a very little. Perhaps he was thinking, as he recalled the memory of the dead man, his very dear friend, how far his own pernicious counsel had helped him along the devious road that had led to so ghastly an ending. He was not, however, much given to the sentimental mood, and his voice was quite steady and almost scornful as he went on.

'And so his sister, the fair Helen of that affair—not that her looks were anything to boast of—is in England, is she, and has been here? I remember. A little sallow creature, limber as an eel, and with eyes that made a man feel awkward when she looked at him; sang like a skylark, though, and danced admirably. Aphy—Aphrodite—what was her real name?'

'Her name was Aphrodite Larpent,' answered Violet. 'You must have heard, in Montreal, how she came to bear it. Her mother, a very foolish, half-educated woman, lighted on the name in some printed book, and insisted on her bearing it. The father was away, called off on business to Quebec; and the minister, who ought to have known better, never remonstrated, so that the poor girl grew up the lawful wearer of what was worse than a nickname.'

'And so, after I forget how many hundred or thousand years, Aphrodite came to be christened,' said Dashwood, yawning. 'I never liked her, and what Lovelace saw— But that is not worth talking of at this time of day. The essential is, what does she want?'

'What every one wants—money—three hundred pounds, as the price of her silence,' answered Violet seriously.

Dashwood laughed incredulously, as he rattled the bunch of glittering charms on his watchguard.

'She is a clever minx,' he said; 'but she'll be cleverer than I take her for if she gets three hundred pounds out of me. Three hundred! She might just as well ask me to liquidate the national debt, that's all.'

'Listen to me, Fred,' said Violet impressively. 'I know that you are poor, dear, and pressed on all hands, and in endless troubles about money. But she—Aphy—is no common creditor, to be put off with excuses or fair words. How you are to obtain this sum—which seems large to her and to me, with our homely habits, but which to you must appear trifling—I must leave to yourself. I only warn you, that within three days the wages of her silence must be paid, unless we are both prepared to face the worst that can be endured.'

'What does she know?' asked Dashwood, biting his lip savagely.

'All!' answered Violet, and her lips became quite white as she uttered the word.

'Ah!' exclaimed Sir Frederick, stamping his boot-heel into the weed-grown earth beneath his feet. 'I can't congratulate you on your choice of a confidante.'

'She was none!' returned Violet, eagerly laying her hand upon his arm. 'We were companions at school and play, but friends never. Nay, I had often a lurking fancy that Aphy hated me. Do you not remember that I told you of some one—or rather two persons—who were in the forest on a certain day in spring—you know the date as well as I—but of whose discretion I felt assured? Those two were Aphy Larpent and her brother Bruce. It was the first whose eyes watched, when—'

'Hush! who can tell what ears may be near!' interrupted Dashwood nervously. 'She wants to be bought off, then,' he added with a groan; 'and yet to sponge on me for ready cash, is like trying to get blood from a stone. You don't know, Violet, how miserable I am, or to what straits I am reduced. I have to fling my silver about, and make small bets, and share in the petty extravagances of men of my station, merely to keep a good face on the matter, and prevent the world from saying that Dashing Dashwood is utterly bowled out; and yet I know I ought to hoard up every half-crown that I toss to a cabman or a waiter. I'm in debt to my servants, my laundress, my very baker, I believe. The lawyers give me cold comfort when I beat up their musty quarters. Half the men I used to know cross the street when they see me coming, afraid, I suppose, of some design upon their pockets. Youngsters about town, who, when first they shewed their foolish faces in Pall Mall, would have paid pretty smartly for the credit of being seen hand-in-glove with Fred Dashwood of the old regiment, now shirk me as if I were a dun. There's an atmosphere of misfortune that attaches itself to a man broken down as I am, and if, like the scent of carrion, it allures the vultures that prey on ruined wretches, it scares off those who would have been the first to hold out the hand of good-fellowship, had a fat legacy dropped in.'

At that moment, the dull, but fast approaching roll of wheels struck upon Violet's quick ear. She turned her head, and saw with dismay the well-known gray horses pass the head of the narrow lane, and close following at their heels, the yellow chariot with the coroneted panels and the coroneted hammercloth, and, doubtless, as inside passengers, the dowager and Miss Fleming.

'That is Lady Livingston—back already. The same ill luck pursues us!' the girl hurriedly exclaimed. 'Here is Aphy Larpent's address. I must go.' And before Sir Frederick could glance at the card that was thrust into his hand, she had sprung forward and kissed him again, this time with a sort of despairing eagerness, and was gone like a vision of the night. He caught one glimpse of her as she darted through the garden-gate, and then the trees concealed her. Sullenly, and with many feelings warring in his breast, he made his way back to London.

Lady Livingston's early return from her customary drive was due to no fickleness of purpose. The day was fine, the roads in excellent condition, and the dowager would, in the normal course of things, have carried out her original intentions—but illness, genuine enough, had laid its grasp upon her, and instinctively she yielded to the warning touch.

'I feel strangely tired, my dear,' she said, 'and there is an odd sensation, too, about the heart, such as I don't remember to have— Never mind; it will be nothing,' continued the sturdy old lady;

'and you need not speak and look, Beatrice, as if I were ready to be measured for my coffin. Only, I will thank you, my love, just to pull the check-string and give the word "Home!"'

The dowager, during the remainder of the drive, was very white and silent, leaning heavily back in her corner of the roomy vehicle, but she uttered no complaint; and the few words which she did speak were derisive of the evident alarm which her young ward and kinswoman entertained on her behalf. As, however, the carriage, drawing near to the Fountains, passed the lane that led down to the river, Lady Livingston, who had been steadfastly gazing out through the window nearest to her, suddenly exclaimed: 'See, look! Beatrice; that must be Miss Maybrook, yonder by the boathouse, with somebody!'

And Beatrice, as her eyes sought the direction indicated, was also convinced, not merely that the female figure which she beheld was that of Violet, but that her masculine companion was no other than her own cousin, Sir Frederick Dashwood.

'I think it was Miss Maybrook,' she said hesitatingly, as the carriage swept on towards the lodge-gates; 'at least, it was strikingly like her.'

The dowager, in the excitement of the recognition, had quite shaken off all signs of suffering. 'Strikingly like—yes, very,' she muttered, with an ominous tightening of the lips, and a portentous contraction of her bushy eyebrows. 'A pretty trick, this, to feign illness, and then steal out to meet a lover so soon as my back is turned. If this be so, she will find that the old cat—as no doubt she calls me to her Lothario yonder—has claws. I forgive anything but treachery.'

Beatrice Fleming, whose gentle nature led her to find excuses for the supposed culprit, tried to interpose a word between the offender and the wrath which she had provoked. 'It was a long way off, dear Lady Livingston, and we had, you must remember, only a moment, before those persons, whoever they may have been, were out of sight. We may be deceived by a resemblance, after all.'

'Very probable, I should say,' answered the old lady grimly. 'But we shall get at the truth, I daresay, for here we are at home. How stupid of Peters to have shut the gate; and here the dawdling old creature, his wife, keeps us waiting, as if she did not know I was out for a drive.'

Now, in strict justice, this blame was undeserved by both the superannuated servants who earned an easy livelihood as janitors at the Fountains. It was indeed an established rule that the gates were to be kept closed, for the exclusion of beery excursionists, who were apt to break boughs and pluck flowers as they went by; and Mrs Peters had come with all reasonable promptitude to give ingress to her mistress. But Lady Livingston, eager to confront the truant dependent, whom she imagined to have practised on her credulity, felt as if the plump gray horses had never gone so slowly; as if the footman had never been so tediously inactive in swinging himself from the rumble, and in letting down the clattering steps; and as if every one around her were in league to impede her investigations and to screen the guilty. Once in the hall, she hurried up-stairs, at a pace which amazed the domestics, unused to such agility on the part of their valetudinarian mistress, and made the best of her way direct to the west wing, and to Miss Maybrook's room.

'Come with me, child,' she had said to Beatrice, on whose arm, however, she refused to lean, as she hastened on. 'She will be rather surprised,' said the dowager, 'to find me waiting for her, when she tears herself away from her stolen interview yonder.'

And without further ceremony than a peremptory tap against the woodwork, she threw open the door. The room, at first, appeared so dark by contrast with the day without, that neither Beatrice nor Lady Livingston could distinguish whether or not the chamber was tenanted. Presently, as their eyes grew more accustomed to the dim light that filtered through between the heavy window-curtains, they beheld a sight which staggered their faith in the evidence of their own senses. There, on the bed, half-covered by shawls, lay Violet, just as they had left her, and in the same attitude, with her beautiful head pillowed on one arm, and a tress of dark hair disarranged and falling loosely over her cheek. Quite quiet and motionless she lay, as if asleep, and there was nothing, which Lady Livingston's peering eyes could detect, changed since her last visit to her companion's room. And yet, how few were the instants since Violet, traversing the grounds with the speed of some hunted animal, to whose feet the anguish of imminent peril lends a frenzied swiftness, had darted, unseen, up the stairs that led to the garden, had, unseen, regained her chamber, and tearing off the hat and velvet walking-jacket which she wore, had flung herself on the bed, where she lay crouched like the weary hare among the fern, when spent with fierce exertion in the long effort to escape the coming hounds! But she played her part so well, that quick and wildly as her heart was beating, her awakening, as the dowager stood beside her couch, was so natural, that the old peeress grew ashamed of her suspicions.

'You feel better now, my dear,' she said, half gruffly, half in kindness; and then added: 'but your hand is burning hot, poor child, though you lie here, on this cold day, without a fire. I don't want to frighten you, but you had better see some one. There's Dr Eccles—he doesn't understand my constitution, but he may yours.'

But Dr Eccles, when summoned, agreed with Miss Maybrook that the latter's indisposition was trifling; she was a little feverish, but that was all. Nevertheless, Beatrice, though she kept her conviction to herself, was none the less assured that the man whom she had seen was Sir Frederick Dashwood, and that Violet had been at his side.

CHAPTER XII.—DOING BUSINESS WITH THE BEHEMOTH.

'You are cornered, Fred. No use in mincing matters about it, my dear boy! You are in the Behemoth's hands, and must just try to make the best of the unhandsome hole in which bad luck has landed you.' So said, between the lazy puffs of his cigar, Major Raffington, who belonged to the *Flag Club*, and was indeed a committee-man of that institution, in the smoking-room of which the above oracular words were delivered. It was early in the day, one of those lazy hours of the forenoon which the most inveterate idler finds it hard to kill, and Dashwood and the major were the sole occupants of that apartment, sacred to nicotine. The latter warrior was by four or five years the older of the two, if there be faith in Debrett and

in the more prosaic parish register; but to judge by the wrinkles on his face and the mottled tints of his complexion, Major Raffington was a perfect Nestor in comparison with the still handsome baronet. That his experience was considerable, was matter of notoriety. 'Old Raff knows a thing or two,' was the verdict of the junior members of the military club, and as the words were generally coupled with a wink or smile, intended to be profoundly significant, it may be conjectured that the 'thing' or two pertained to the shadier arcana of London life.

There are men who through life contrive to pick their way through muddy places without being visibly bespattered by the mire that adheres to the less prudent, and Major Raffington was one of those men. No one had ever heard of his possessing any property in particular, and yet he had lived on the fat of the land from infancy upwards, and was never heard to complain of insufficiency of means. An astonishing number of gentlemen successively fail to attain the rank of field-officer, sell out, more for the benefit of their creditors than of themselves, and are shelved thenceforth as captains by courtesy. But Raffington had done better for himself, and was now a major unattached, still drawing pay from the national exchequer, although what he had ever done to merit his position as a pensioner of confiding Britannia, was an enigma which cold-blooded utilitarians found difficult of solution. The pay of a major of infantry, unattached, did not, however, in Raffington's opinion, suffice for his maintenance, and the 'private means,' of which he was wont negligently to speak at times, being a mystery to the veriest busy-bodies of his club, he was popularly reported to provide for his wants by somewhat dubious industries. Jackal to a money-lender, hanger-on to a great racing-stable, volunteer bear-leader to any young cub of fashion who was willing to part freely with his cash in return for the good offices of an Asmodeus who expected his Cleophas not to prove close-fisted; the major managed to make both ends meet, and with something to spare, at the termination of the year. What he did with his savings, if such he possessed, nobody knew. He was a man who never lent a shilling, dined luxuriously at the expense of other people, perhaps three hundred days in the twelvemonth, and when he played at whist, generally rose a winner. Men said that 'Raff' was a deep dog, and it is certain that he was not over-communicative about his personal affairs, though he received the confidences of many.

'Of course I am cornered; I know that well enough, without your telling me so,' was Dashwood's half-savage retort. 'I declare that some of you fellows really seem to roll out your words as if you luxuriated in them when you are on the theme of another man's ruin. You tell him he's up a tree, and under a cloud, and the rest of it, when the poor devil only asks a helping hand to get clear of the plight that he sees more clearly than any one else can do.'

'Something to enjoy, eh, in the misfortunes of our best friends?' composedly chimed in the major. 'I don't know whether you have read Rochefoucauld, or whether you are misquoting him intuitively, as Monsieur Jourdain talked prose without knowing it. There—there, old boy, I see you are in no humour for chaffing, and indeed I'm not very literary myself, though I do dip into a book now

and then, for the sake of the dinner-parties. A little bit of reading helps a man over many a conversational stile, at least with women. And now to business. First of all, the Behemoth has bought up all your loose kites, and holds every attainable bit of stamped paper signed by Frederick Dashwood. There's not a doubt of that.'

'I don't see why that circumstance should concern me so very much, after all,' gloomily rejoined the baronet, knocking away the feathery white ash from his cigar.

'Don't you? I do,' answered Major Raffington, with a twinkle in his eye. 'I should have thought you had cut your eye-teeth long enough ago to have found out that there is sometimes safety, not merely in the multitude of counsellors, but in the multitude of creditors as well. Perhaps it's on the same principle which inspires the proverb that a council of war never fights, but, at anyrate, a fellow who is down on his luck had better trust to the forbearance of the ruck of those to whom he owes money, than depend on that of some one thumping capitalist. When once, however, you are fairly netted, you had better look your position fairly in the face. The Baron, the King, or the Behemoth, whichever you like to call him, is, really and truly, not one half so black as he is painted.'

'I'm glad to hear it. Report certainly does lay on the colour with a full brush, as artists say,' growled Dashwood, as he twisted his tawny moustache.

'I know him pretty well,' pursued the major, 'and it is my belief that four-fifths of what is said of him are sheer lies, and that the residue is exaggerated. Like some other of the dons and great-guns in his own line, he can afford to be lenient, and even generous, when he likes, which is precisely what the small fry of the loan-mongers cannot. I could tell you of a dozen instances in which Shylock has been—I won't say satisfied with less than his bond; that's common enough, when more can't be had—but liberal to some poor beggar that he had got tight in his clutch, to do as he pleased with. I'm not given to fine phrases; but if one of ourselves, my lord, or Sir Harry, or the like, had shewn as much mercy to a defaulter on the double event as I have known the Behemoth to do to some deep in his books, he would have been canonised by the clubs as the prince of good-fellows. That's all!'

Dashwood flung away the stump of his cigar.

'And when, Raff, am I to have the honour to be presented to this chivalrous king of the money-lenders?' sneered he. 'You are Lord Chamberlain, and understand the etiquette of the thing. I do not. But the sooner I make a spoon or spoil a horn, as the phrase is, the better, for I am sick of suspense, and, besides, I want a little ready cash. Such a Cæsus as you describe, and a disguised philanthropist to boot, might oblige me with the trifle I require—only three poor hundreds—without boggling about marketable security, surely.'

'Nothing more probable,' coolly replied the major. 'I don't think—for, mind you, I do not know anything of the Baron's intentions—that he means mischief because he has bought up your floating securities. And if he takes a fellow in hand, he generally stands by him like a trump. As for the meeting, I will introduce you now, if you like, and at this hour we shall be sure to find

the Behemoth at his post. You've got the papers that I told you would be necessary?—All right. The streets are not bad for walking to-day, and Pitt Street isn't a very laborious pilgrimage.'

'One word of advice, Fred, my boy,' said Major Raffington impressively, as the two walked together towards the narrow and gloomy street, in the parish of St James the Courtyl, which towards the close of the last century had been named after the Heaven-born minister; 'or, rather, two words. Take them in good part, old man, for they are kindly meant, I assure you.'

'I never heard anything disagreeable that was not supposed to be kindly meant,' answered Dashwood, almost sullenly. 'Well, fire as many shotged guns as you please, Raff, and I promise to consider them as an amicable salute.'

'Well: don't lie to him, for he won't stand it; and don't higgie with him, for he won't bear it. That is all!' returned the major quietly; and as Dashwood turned and glared at him, he went on, with perfect phlegm: 'You see, dear boy, it's well to know the country you ride over before you get into the pigskin. Swartz is a very peculiar man to deal with. His hobby, to conduct both sides of a bargain at once, and to settle the terms of the transaction once for all, and without contradiction. Queer, you'll say.'

'Very queer!' struck in Sir Frederick.

'And yet,' pursued the major, 'I don't call the plan a bad one. It saves time and temper. Give the Behemoth his head, and you will find yourself on the sunny side of the hedge. Dispute with him, as if you were dealing with a pig-jobber for live-pork, and you will be in Queer Street before you've done with him, as some uncommonly knowing gentlemen have been before this. There was a man we both knew—Downie, Fribble Downie—who tried to be too clever for the Jew, and burnt his fingers, rather!'

'I say, Raff,' exclaimed Sir Frederick, with a forced laugh, 'while we are on the candid and outspoken line of country, perhaps you'll tell me, confidentially, what percentage you will get from the Behemoth if we do business together? It ought to be a good one.'

Major Raffington chuckled with imperturbable good-humour as he passed his arm through Dashwood's. 'That little poke, which you meant for a home-thrust, Fred, does not disturb me in the least,' was his cool reply: 'you would hardly have paid me the compliment of seeking me out as your adviser in this affair, but for the gossip you have heard as to my supposed understanding with the Baron. Now, if I were a humbug, or easy to affront, I should get on my high-horse, and inform you that I did not stir in the matter except to render service to an old friend and brother-officer. As it is, I'll tell you the exact truth. I shan't get a sixpence of commission. But Swartz likes to extend his connection, and when I help him to do it, I feel sure that I shall be the better for it in pocket one day or other. I suppose he makes some sort of calculation, but hang me if I know, when I cash his cheque, the precise fashion in which I earned it.'

Dashwood's laugh this time was one of hearty amusement. 'You are a character, old boy,' he said, 'and I was an ungrateful beast to be rude to you. This is Pitt Street. I never was in the mouldy old thoroughfare before.'

'And here is the Baron's house,' responded the major, stopping before one of the tall, narrow, and high-roofed dwellings, begrimed by the smoke of many years, which line the two sides of Pitt Street. 'Now, don't forget my advice. He will make a better bargain for you, on the smooth, than you will ever make for yourself if you object to his proposals.'

A dismal house it was, with its dirty windows, its blistered area railing, and stained steps, above which stood two preposterous extinguishers of rusty iron, into which many a link and flambeau had been thrust, in the benighted times when gas was not. The door was opened by a white-faced small boy, preternaturally sharp-featured, slim, and alert, whose page's livery was of the glossiest green cloth, and his sugar-loaf buttons not of vile brass, as are those of so many of these duodecimo male retainers, but resplendent with new gilding. This precociously intelligent urchin grinned benignly on the major, while regarding his companion with a furtive leer. Guided by this gorgeously apparelled imp, the two officers ascended the stairs to the second floor, and Dashwood, who looked inquisitively about him, was struck by the incongruities which he beheld. The house would have been much improved by fresh paint, fresh paper-hangings, and fresh air; but the staircase was draped in thick and soft carpet of costly material, but sober pattern. Cobwebs clung to the cornices, and the walls were blotched by damp; but the open doors of two or three rooms revealed silken curtains, statues, china, and costly furniture. But the greatest surprise awaited Dashwood when he was inducted into the presence of the king of the London money-lenders himself.

Sir Frederick, who, unluckily for himself, had been a borrower ever since he had emerged from the halcyon period of legal infancy, was well used to the manners and practices of the majority of those accommodating persons who accelerate the spendthrift's progress down the slippery road to ruin. Some of these philanthropists inhabit squalid dens, at least during the hours of business; others are unwholesome-looking attorneys, whose legitimate profession is a mere screen to their illicit dabbling in post-obits; but there are a few who dwell in shewy sets of chambers, and a smaller minority whose mansions fill their suburban neighbours with admiring envy. Dashwood knew the Behemoth's religion, or, at least, race, and he was prepared to encounter a fleshy-featured Jew, with a hook beak, raven-black hair, and an oriental addition to emerald breast-pins, brilliant rings, and cable-like watch-chains. Swartz was originally from Frankfurt too—that he knew, and might be expected to speak with that Hebrew-German accent, which is only to be heard in perfection in the Judengasse of that *ex* Free City. What Dashwood really saw was a florid gentleman, light-haired, and with trim whiskers of an amber tint, and who, from his dress and demeanour, might easily have been mistaken for a Somersetshire squire, of a more modern type than honest Mr Western, one who rode a little, and shot a little, and farmed a good deal, but who never allowed his field-sports or his agricultural operations to interfere with his presence in his place in parliament, or in the bay-window of his club. His hands, on which glittered no rings, were pink, plump, and well-cared for; his teeth

were very white, and his small steady eyes were of a dark-blue; altogether, but for the aquiline nose, and the faintest tinge of foreign accent, no one could have guessed the Baron to be either an alien or an Israelite. The Behemoth's chamber of audience was a long, low room, formed, no doubt, by some pulling down of party-walls, and here there were no signs of the decay and neglect elsewhere visible. The pictures were few, but choice; and their gilt frames and the mouldings of the large mirrors contrasted well with the subdued tint of the pearly French wall-paper, and the sober richness of the Tournay carpet. The furniture and hangings were of pale-blue silk; and there was even a profusion of works of art, of precious marbles, stained glass, tall vases from Japan, richly inlaid weapons from the East, of books in costly bindings, and of miscellaneous prettinesses in silver, ivory, and bronze. Baron Swartz rose from his chair with a courteous bow and a wave of the hand, as he motioned to his visitors to be seated.

'I am happy to make your acquaintance, Sir Frederick,' he said, with much urbanity; 'and, as your time is probably of value, as well as my own, I will not keep you longer in suspense as to what you come about than is unavoidably necessary. The major here, my good friend, yesterday handed to me a written statement—here it is—of the general state of your affairs, which, with a few rectifications, I find to be tolerably correct. Have you the papers which I requested you to bring? Thanks!'

And as the baronet, somewhat sullenly, laid the documents on the table, he felt that the Baron's steady blue eyes were reading him, though with no obtrusive scrutiny, like a printed book.

'Ah, well,' said the Behemoth smilingly, as he spread out the papers before him, 'I only ask a few minutes—ten, at the outside—while I glance at these. Can you employ them, gentlemen, in the perusal of light, very light literature?' indicating with his plump forefinger a collection of periodicals, illustrated newspapers, and novels in all the freshness of their newly hatched condition. Or, if Sir Frederick cares for Cuyps and Poussins, perhaps, my dear major, you will do the honours of my little collection. There are some pretty little gems of pastoral landscape, which are no strangers to you.'

And without further preface, he began to peruse the documents, making notes on a sheet of paper as he read on. The major and his friend rose, and made the circuit of the room, the former assuming, willingly enough, the office of cicerone, and calling attention to the beauties of this or that valuable painting, without much heed to the evident indifference of the baronet, to whom a bull by Paul Potter, and an over-driven ox on its road to the cattle-market, were objects of equal unconcern.

'I conclude it's all right,' at last said Dashwood, with a yawn. 'I say,' he added, with more animation, but below his breath, 'if he lends me any money, he won't insist, will he, on my taking part of the loan in these sort of things? I've known that done before this.'

'So have I!' coolly answered the major. 'But set your mind at rest, Fred, my boy, for, unless your loan be one worthy of Rothschild, he'll hardly ask you to walk off with these. Did you take the paintings I have been shewing you for Wardour Street imitations—Old Masters done to order at

thirty shillings! There's not one of these bits of canvas that Swartz has not covered, continental fashion, with gold naps, once, twice, ay, thrice over. Bless you, my dear fellow, do you suppose he lives here, out of office-hours? Not he! He has a villa at Kensington, that cost Heaven knows what, for conservatories and decorations; and the dinners he gives there are royal, sir, for taste and splendour. I've only been asked there once; and as for the company, I assure you'—

But Major Raffington's definition of those who sat around the Baron's mahogany was cut short by the bland voice of the Baron himself.

'Excuse me, gentlemen, for having trespassed so long upon your patience. I shall be happy, as refers to Sir Frederick Dashwood's business with me, to come to the point at once. Pray, sit down. I promise to be brief.'

'I may as well say at once, Baron Swartz,' said Dashwood, as he resumed his seat, 'that I am in pressing want of a small advance at the present time. I cannot explain'—

'My very dear sir,' interrupted the Behemoth, again lifting his forefinger, 'let me entreat you to spare yourself the unnecessary trouble of even a partial explanation. I never met with a new client who did not require some such slight assistance at the first. What is it to be?—A hundred pounds?—two—three?' And he rustled over the leaves of his open cheque-book, and, dipping his pen in the ornamental inkstand beside him, smiled upon Sir Frederick with a benevolence that absolutely disconcerted the baronet.

'Three hundred pounds will be sufficient,' said the latter, almost sheepishly; 'but as regards interest and security'—

'Leave the consideration of both, if you please, to me,' said the Baron, again breaking in on the thread of his customer's discourse.

'I told him,' said Major Raffington, with soldierly bluntness, 'that he would find that the best plan.'

'And you were right, my good major,' rejoined the Baron. 'So, now, with your kind permission, I will state my views. The case, to my poor fancy, lies, as your English lawyers say, in a nutshell. I am now the proprietor of—here they are—all the acceptances, sadly overdue, which Sir Frederick has scattered over London. To press for immediate payment'—and here the blue eyes fixed themselves very steadily on those other blue eyes, by far the handsomer in shape and hue, but not so piercing or so steady, which belonged to Dashwood—'would put you, my dear sir, to sad inconvenience. I have also a list of liabilities, simple contract debts, mere extracts from tradesmen's ledgers, for which I could compromise, without any bankruptcy or unpleasantness of that sort; and these, on certain conditions, I am willing to discharge. Here is a bill at three months' (hastily filling it up) 'for the advance which you require—interest, stamp, and premium deducted. You receive, in cash, two hundred and forty pounds for your acceptance for three hundred. Naturally, I expect you will be punctual in meeting this demand' (and here the Baron smiled) 'when due. This bond, this bill of sale on your horses and furniture—and this agreement to insure your life in such office as I may select, will, with the additional formality of bills at two and three months respectively, make

up the amount of your former securities, which I will return to you cancelled. And I don't think, Sir Frederick, that I could easily have stated terms that should have been less onerous to you, as you probably perceive.

There was a little pause, as Dashwood read over the memorandum of the various sums; he could not but admit, as he signed the required papers, and pocketed the cheque and the cancelled acceptances, that he was leniently and considerably dealt with.

'A glass of sherry?' said the Baron, and as he touched the knob of a bell within his reach, the page in the green livery brought in the desired refreshment.

'Beats any cellar in London,' the major said, afterwards, of the wine in question. 'He had it, a present, from some tremendous grandee in Spain.'

'Tell me one thing, Raff,' said Dashwood, as the pair walked away down Pitt Street; 'what did he let me off so cheaply for? I declare it was a relief when he knocked sixty off the draft for the three hundred. It proved him to be a flesh-and-blood Hebrew, after all. Still, he must have some motive, mustn't he?'

'I suppose so,' said the major carelessly; 'most of us have. But as for guessing what the Behemoth's intentions are, that is too hard a nut to crack. I daresay you'll find it out for yourself, some day, dear boy.'

PROPHETIC DAYS.

WOULD-BE weatherwise folks would be saved a world of trouble if experience justified the popular faith in certain days of the year—saints' days, of course, most of them—having such a prophetic power attached to them, that by merely using our eyes and our almanacs, we may learn what the future will bring 'of good or evil luck, of plagues, of dearths, or season's quality.' These ominous days are but few in number, something under a score; and it is impossible to guess why they, any more than their fellows, should be invested with such a valuable attribute.

If the New-year's first morning sky is covered by clouds of a dusky red hue, there will be much debate and strife among the great ones of the earth, and—this we may readily believe—many robberies will be perpetrated before the year has run its course. Should the sun deign to shine upon St Vincent's Day, dwellers in wine-growing lands may take heart and rejoice, for they will see more wine than water—that is to say, they may calculate upon a dry season, especially conducive to a profitable vintage. Less limited in its application is the fore-knowledge acquirable by meteorological students upon the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul, according to the old monkish rhymes, one of the many translations of which runs:

If St Paul's Day be fair and clear,
It does betide a happy year;
But if it chance to snow or rain,
Then will be dear all kind of grain;
If clouds or mist do dark the sky,
Great store of birds and beasts shall die;
And if the winds do fly aloft,
Then war shall vex the kingdom oft.

Candlemas prognostications go, as those of dreams are said to do, by contraries; fine weather on Candlemas Day being prophetic of a long

succession of unseasonably cold days, and necessarily a failure of the crops; while foul weather on that day is a sure promise of a bright spring, with a summer to match:

If Candlemas Day be dry and fair,
The half o' winter's to come, and mair;
If Candlemas Day be wet and foul,
The half o' winter's gone at Yule.

Or as a southern version puts it:

If Candlemas Day be fair and bright,
Winter will have another flight;
But if it be dark with clouds and rain,
Winter is gone, and will not come again.

This idea is common throughout Europe. In Germany, they aver that the badger peeps out of his hole upon Candlemas morning, and if the ground be white with snow, takes his walks abroad; but should the sunshine greet his eyes, he will not venture from his snug abiding-place; being of one mind with the shepherd, who would rather see a wolf enter his fold, than the sun, upon Candlemas Day. So in Norfolk the proverb goes that a shepherd would prefer seeing his wife on the bier, than the sun shining clear upon Candlemas Day; and they firmly believe in the wisdom of the rhymes:

On Candlemas Day, if the thorns hang a drop,
Then you are sure of a good pea-crop.

As far as the sun shines in on Candlemas Day,
So far will the snow blow in afore Old May.

In 1855, a correspondent of *Notes and Queries* announced that the Candlemas prognostication had been verified in Norfolk, if nowhere else, when a spell of rough winter weather was brought to an end by a fair and sunny Candlemas Day. 'On the following evening, about ten o'clock, a thaw suddenly commenced; but on the evening of the fifth, frost again set in with increased intensity, which continued uninterruptedly to February the twenty-fourth, the ice in the "broads" ranging from eight inches to a foot in thickness.' But he had forgotten to take the change of style into account; so the striking verification of the ancient superstition was no verification at all. The Hebrideans observe, or did observe, an odd custom. On Candlemas Day, in every house, a sheaf of oats was dressed in feminine attire, and laid, with a big club by its side, in a basket, called 'Brüd's bed.' Before turning in for the night, the mistress and her maids cried in chorus: 'Brüd is come! Brüd is welcome!' If, next morning, an impression of the club was visible in the ashes on the hearth, it was held a sure presage of an abundant harvest and a prosperous year; if the club had not left its mark, it was an omen of coming bad times.

Down Winchester-way it is commonly believed that from whichever quarter the wind blows chiefly upon Palm-Sunday, it will blow during the best part of the summer. In Hertfordshire they hold that

A good deal of rain upon Easter Day
Gives a good crop of grass, but little good hay.

If the sun shines clearly on Easter Day, good weather and good times are in store, and one may make sure of seeing the sun upon Whitsunday. The lightest of showers falling upon Ascension Day is an omen dire, foretelling sickness among cattle, and great scarcity of food for

man. A reverse result follows a dry Holy-Thurs-day, and pleasant weather may be expected almost up to Christmastide. A fine Whitsunday means a plentiful harvest, but if any rain falls then, thunder and lightning, bringing blight and mildew with it, may be expected. Almost as ill-omened is a wet Midsummer Day, for although apples, pears, and plums will not be affected thereby, nut-bushes will prove barren, and the corn-fields be smitten with disease.

It was a proverb in Scotland that if the deer rose dry and lay down dry on Bullion's Day, there would be an early harvest. Considering the soldier-saint was the chosen patron of publicans and dispensers of good liquor, it seems odd that a shower falling upon St Martin's Day should be supposed to indicate a twenty days' opening of heaven's sluices. Martin, however, when he went in for wet, was more moderate than his uncanonised brother Swithin, commonly called St Swithin; he, as every one knows, is content with nothing under forty days:

Saint Swithin's Day, gin ye do rain,
For forty days it will remain;
Saint Swithin's Day, an' ye be fair,
For forty days 'twill rain nae mair.

Why this should be, has been explained in this wise: When the good Saxon Bishop of Winchester departed this life some thousand years ago, he was, in accordance with his expressed wish, buried in the churchyard, so that his humble grave might be trodden by the feet of passers-by, and receive the eaves-droppings from the abbey roof. Thus he was permitted to rest undisturbed for a hundred years; then the clergy of the diocese took it into their heads to have the saint taken up, and deposited inside the cathedral; but when they set about the work, the rain came down with such violence that they were compelled to desist, and finding the deluge continued for forty days, interpreted it to be a warning against removing Swithin's remains, and therefore contented themselves with erecting a chapel over his grave. As poor Robin sings:

Whether this were so or no,
Is more than you or I do know.
Better it is to rise betime,
And to make hay while sun doth shine,
Than to believe in tales and lies
Which idle monks and friars devise.

Mr Earle, however, has shewn that while it is true that St Swithin did leave directions that he should be buried in a vile place, under the eaves-droppings, on the north side of Winchester church, there was no supernatural protest on his part against his relics being removed to the magnificent shrine prepared for them in Ethelwold's cathedral. On the contrary, the weather was most propitious for the ceremony. Whoever was at the pains of inventing the story of the forty days' tempest, misapplied his imaginative faculties altogether, since the phenomenon popularly associated with St Swithin is as apocryphal as the story concocted to account for it. From observations made at Greenwich in the twenty years ending with 1861, it appears that during that term forty days' rain was never known to follow St Swithin's Day; while, oddly enough, the wettest weather came when the saint failed to 'christen the apples.' In only six instances—in 1841, 1845, 1851, 1853, 1854, and 1856—did it rain at all upon the fateful day; and the forty days

following shewed respectively twenty-three, twenty-six, thirteen, eighteen, sixteen, and fourteen rainy ones. On the other hand, there were twelve wet days out of the forty after the dry St Swithin of 1842, twenty-two after that of 1843, twenty-nine after that of 1860, and no less than thirty-one after that of 1848. Not that any evidence is likely to shake the faith of believers in the ancient notion. Convinced against their will, they will hold their old opinion still, like Hone's lady-friend, who, finding her favourite saint's day fine, prophesied a long term of beautiful weather; but when a few drops of rain fell towards evening, veered round, and was positive six weeks of wet impended. Her first prophecy turned out to be the correct one; but the obstinate dame would not have it so, declaring stoutly that if no rain had fallen in the daytime, there certainly must have been some at night. There are rainy saints beside Swithin; in Belgium they pin their faith to St Godeliève; in France, to Saints Gervais and Protais, and St Médard.

If Bartholomew's Day be ushered in by a hoar-frost, followed by mist, a sharp, biting winter will come in due time. A fine Michaelmas Day betokens a sunshiny winter, the pleasantness of which will be neutralised by nipping, long-staying north-easters. Merry Christmas sadly belies its name in its prognostications, which are of such a very lugubrious order, that, did we trust in them, we should be inclined to parody Carey's famous song, and pray:

Of all the days that are in the week,
Come Christmas but on one day,
And that is the day that comes between
The Saturday and the Monday!

A Sunday Christmas Day is the only one prophetic of unalloyed good, being the harbinger of a new year in which beasts will thrive, fields flourish, and all lands rest in peace. When Christmas Day falls upon a Wednesday, we may hope for a genial summer, as recompense for a stormy winter; but when it falls upon any of the remaining five, a severe winter without any compensation is in store for us; supplemented by war and cattle-plague, when the festival comes upon a Monday; with mortality among kings and great people, when it comes upon a Tuesday; and by a great clearing-off of old folks, when it falls upon a Saturday. If Childermas Day be wet, it threatens us with dearth; if it be fine, it promises us abundance; and as the wind blows on the last night of December, it tells what the unborn year will bring—for

If New-year's eve night-wind blow south,
It betokeneth warmth and growth;
If west, much milk, and fish in the sea;
If north, much cold and storms there will be;
If east, the trees will bear much fruit;
If north-east, flee it, man and brute.

Not the least amusing thing about all these sage predictions, as regards weather, is that they take no account of the change from old to new style, which altered the exact position of the days named; there being now, for example, a difference of twelve days between old St Swithin's and new St Swithin's Day. Weather prophets are above minding this awkward trifle.

Printed and Published by W. & R. CHAMBERS, 47 Paternoster Row, LONDON, and 339 High Street, EDINBURGH.
Also sold by all Booksellers.